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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA: NARCOTICS MAJORS LIST CERTIFICATION

REF: STATE 029120

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: Though Colombia remains a major producer and trafficker of illicit narcotics, the Government of Colombia (GOC) continues as an unwavering ally in the fight against both narcotics production and trafficking. Our core bilateral counternarcotics eradication and interdiction programs in Colombia are producing record results. Extraditions, desertions, and justice programs also contribute to the success of counternarcotics programs and operations. U.S. assistance to Colombia continues to be a success story and the Embassy recommends full narcotics cooperation certification for Colombia in 2008.
END SUMMARY.

Eradication

¶2. (U) In 2007 the GOC eradicated 219,529 hectares of coca. This is a new record for total eradication.

-- For the year the Colombian National Police (CNP) aerially sprayed 153,133 hectares of coca, and the GOC manually eradicated 66,396 hectares. In 2008, the GOC's goal for total eradication is 230,000 hectares. This will be a new record if reached.

-- The GOC continues to expand its manual eradication program. In 2007 the GOC manually eradicated 66,396 hectares of coca, a 59 percent increase from 2006. For 2008 the GOC plans to manually eradicate 100,000 hectares-- The GOC continues to conduct monitoring and verification missions to ensure the aerial eradication program is conducted without undue risk to human health and the environment, as required under Colombian and U.S. law. The Environmental Management Plan for aerial eradication specifies verification on a semi-annual basis, and the Narcotics Affairs Section (NAS) has increased the monitoring using a gyroscopic camera (gyrocam).

-- Spray verification and Crime and Narcotics Center (CNC) analysts confirm that growers are adapting to aerial eradication by planting smaller, irregularly shaped fields to evade successful chemical application, and seeking out eradication free zones in isolated, politically sensitive areas. Spraying and increased public security presences have also removed coca from more densely populated areas where cultivation had been practiced for years in the absence of law enforcement efforts. This marginalization of the coca trade to outlying areas is eating away at Colombia's cultural acceptance of coca cultivation and increasing the costs of narcotics production, but it also strains eradication flight hour and infrastructure costs. The GOC is constantly changing tactics and strategies to deal with this phenomenon.

-- In 2008 the CNP began to assign judicial police to manual eradication teams to gather evidence for asset forfeiture investigations against property owners who use their land for the cultivation or processing of illegal crops. Despite legal, procedural, and security obstacles, this asset seizure initiative is a crucial step towards real deterrence of cultivation and replanting after eradication.

Interdiction

¶3. (U) Interdiction continues near record levels.

-- In 2007, Colombia's security forces, led by the police and navy, seized over 190 metric tons of cocaine and coca base. In addition, security forces destroyed 141 cocaine HCl laboratories and over 2,000 base labs.

-- The Colombian Army's Counterdrug Brigade conducted interdiction missions and High Value Target (HVT) operations and contributed significantly to improved ground security for spray aircraft again in 2007. This unit also seized a substantial amount of cocaine, coca base, precursor chemicals, and coca seedlings.

Extradition and High Value Targets (HVT)

¶4. (U) 2007 were both record years for extradition and HVT missions and 2008 is on track to be another record year.

-- The USG has no better international partner in the area of extradition than the Government of Colombia. Colombia has extradited 621 individuals to the United States between the beginning of President Uribe's administration in August of 2002 and the end of 2007. In 2007 the GOC extradited 164 people to the United States, including major drug traffickers. Through May 2008, another 54 individuals have been extradited. Furthermore, Colombia is actively investigating and prosecuting cases against major drug traffickers and cooperating with U.S. judicial authorities to provide evidence and witnesses for prosecutions of extradited Colombian nationals facing trial in the United States.

-- In 2007, the GOC security forces captured or killed a number of High Value Targets (HVTs) that included high level FARC members and/or narcotraffickers, many of whom have been, or are awaiting extradition to the United States. In 2008, three members of the FARC Secretariat have died, including the numbers one and two.

Rule of Law, Peace, and Justice

¶5. Colombia continues to expand governmental presence and the government is now able to provide justice and other services due to the improved security situation in many areas.

-- Contributing more broadly to the effort to combat illicit narcotics production, Colombia has maintained a police presence in every municipality. To further improve Colombia's security situation, Mobile Carabineros Squadrons continue to actively patrol rural Colombia. Increased law enforcement and expansion of government control into previously hard-to-govern areas is a dramatic success story. Homicides are at their lowest level in more than twenty years. During Uribe's administration, kidnappings have decreased more than 80 percent, homicides by 45 percent, and acts of terrorism by 63 percent.

-- In 2008 the GOC completed the final phase of its implementation of a new criminal procedure code and a transition to an efficient and transparent oral accusatory justice system. The initial indicators of the transition are very positive, with the time to resolve criminal cases reduced by more than 75% and an increase in prosecutions in criminal cases from 3% to over 60%. By year end 2007, Colombia had trained, with USG support, more than 40,000 judges, investigators, public prosecutors, forensic experts, and defenders in the new system.

-- The Uribe administration continued its peace process efforts in 2007. To date, over 15,000 members of the FARC, ELN, AUC, and other illegal armed groups have individually deserted, and another 31,000 have been demobilized in groups through negotiations with the GOC.

A Great Partner and A Success Story

¶7. (U) The GOC is a great partner and has met or exceeded all of its identified narcotics cooperation certification criteria set forth in section 481(h)(2)(A) of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 for eligibility for United States assistance. The GOC is firmly committed to fighting the production and trade in illicit drugs and remains a key USG ally in the fight against narcoterrorism. President Uribe has repeatedly emphasized in public that the narcotics threat is the single biggest enemy of democracy in Colombia, and security forces have responded accordingly. U.S. assistance to Colombia continues to be a success story and the Embassy recommends full narcotics cooperation certification for Colombia again in 2008.

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